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ABSTRACT

South Pointe Elementary School in Miami, Florida, was the first public-private educational partnership in the United States. It opened in September 1991 as a collaboration between Education Alternatives (EAI), Inc., a private for-profit educational company, and Dade County Public Schools. The 5-year contract stipulated that the school would implement EAI's Tesseract Way educational program and that EAI would provide instructional support, including ongoing teacher training, curricula, and classroom equipment and supplies. This document reports on outcomes of the following three reforms: (1) the degree to which the Tesseract Way program incorporated a shared school vision; (2) the success of the school's collaborative relationships; and (3) the impact of parent-education programs, outreach programs, and the empowerment of parents in school decision-making processes. Data, collected during the 1992-93 school year, were obtained through interviews with teachers and a parent-satisfaction survey. Findings indicate that there was a high degree of agreement between the operation of South Pointe Elementary and the Tesseract Way philosophy; the professional staff believed that children greatly benefitted from the program; and the Tesseract Way principles were becoming institutionalized into the daily work culture of the schools' outreach programs. The counselors and the principal effectively provided parents with information they needed to receive social and health-related services; however, more work needed to be done to increase attendance at parent workshops. The appendix contains the parent survey and information on SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) resources. (LMI)

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A Public-Private Partnership–Year Two: South Pointe Elementary School

Miami, Florida

by
Thomas H. Peeler
July 1993

SERVE
SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education

Affiliated with the
School of Education
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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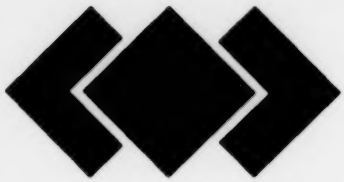
Design by: Kelly Killman

About the SERVE Laboratory

The SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) is the federally funded education laboratory serving Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Governed by a coalition of business leaders, policymakers, and educators, SERVE works with states, districts, and schools to improve educational outcomes, especially for at-risk and rural students. Its mission is to promote and support the continuous improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast.

The name of the laboratory reflects a commitment to creating a shared vision of the future of education in the Southeast. Laboratory goals are to address critical issues in the region, work as a catalyst for positive change, serve as a broker of exemplary research and practice, and become an invaluable source of information for individuals working to promote systemic educational improvement.

To better meet the needs of state and local education stakeholders, SERVE has offices in each of the six states in its region. The contract management and research and development office is located at the School of Education, University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The laboratory's information office is located in Tallahassee, Florida. SERVE's on-line computerized information system is housed in Atlanta, Georgia. Field service offices are located in all six states.



Introduction

A Unique Partnership

South Pointe Elementary School in Miami, Florida, is the nation's first public-private partnership in education. It opened in September 1991 as a collaboration between Education Alternatives, Inc. (EAI), a private for-profit educational company, and Dade County Public Schools. Their five-year contract stipulates that South Pointe will implement EAI's Tesseract Way educational program and that EAI will provide the school instructional support, including on-going teacher training, curricula, and classroom equipment and supplies. The term "Tesseract," the trademark for all of Education Alternatives, Inc., schools, is taken from Madeleine L'Engle's, *A Wrinkle in Time*. In this famous children's book, children take a fantasy trip through a tesseract, a fifth dimensional corridor for traveling to exciting new worlds.

Purpose of Report

This report is a follow-up to A Public-Private Partnership: South Pointe Elementary School, which describes the introduction of the EAI educational program at South Pointe during the 1991-1992 school year. Sponsored by the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE), that study examined how the Tesseract Way addressed three dimensions of restructuring: the core technology of teaching and learning; changes in the occupational situation for teachers, including shared decision making and working conditions; changes in the distribution of power between schools and their clients. It concentrated on how well the professional staff was able to implement research-endorsed learning principles into the children's daily activities.

The data for A Public-Private PartnershipYear Two: South Pointe Elementary School was collected during the 1992-1993 school year and focuses on the following three reforms:

1. the degree to which the Tesseract Way program has incorporated a shared vision into the culture of South Pointe Elementary School
2. the success of South Pointe's collaborative relationships with the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, the medical community, and other agencies that serve the school's children and families
3. the impact of parent education programs, outreach efforts, and the empowerment of parents in the decision-making process at the school

Demographic Information

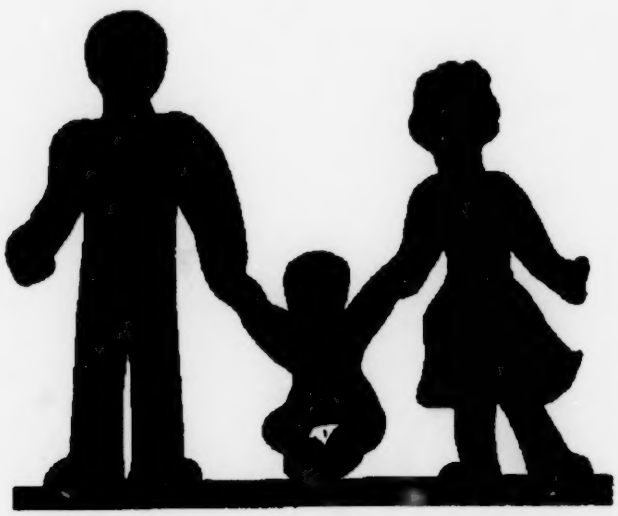
The enrollment for the 1992-93 school year of South Pointe Elementary School was approximately 750 students, compared to an enrollment of 700 students during the 1991-92 school year. Many of the additional 50 students had lived in Homestead, Florida, and relocated after the damaging effects of Hurricane Andrew. The ethnic breakdown for the 1992-93 school year was comparable to the 1991-92 school year: 66 percent of the students were Hispanic, 11 percent were black, and the remaining 23 percent were white or from other ethnic groups. Approximately 80 percent of the students were on the free and reduced lunch programs.

South Pointe has a pupil-teacher ratio of 15 to 1. This ratio is accomplished by assigning a certified teacher and an associate teacher (university intern) to classrooms of approximately thirty pupils.

Organizational experts from the corporate world such as Bennis and Nanus (1985), Covey (1989), Peters and Waterman (1992), and Schein (1985) indicate that most successful businesses have visions that help bond people together as members of a community. Such communities know their purpose, the reason they exist, and the importance of the clientele they are serving. Recent studies of successful schools (Fullan, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1991) also attest to the importance of a shared vision among all participants. The shared vision, or covenant of guiding principles, gives rise to the shared norms, beliefs, values, and behaviors of the participants that form the culture of the workplace.

The vision statement for the Tesseract Way program at South Pointe Elementary School is as follows:

> *Every child has gifts and talents. We accept the challenge to find and nurture these qualities in each child.*



A Shared Vision

Guiding Principles

South Pointe's vision statement is based on eight guiding principles. To assess the degree to which the vision and principles are becoming part of the day-to-day activities at the school, data were collected through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations at South Pointe.

Principle 1: A student's Personal Education Plan (PEP) forms the basis upon which the student's goals and activities are planned.

At South Pointe, the Personal Education Plan, which specifies the goals and objectives for a student, is developed by the parent, student, and teacher. Four parent conferences take place during the year. During the first conference, which is devoted to parents sharing information with the teacher, parents are encouraged to talk about the social and academic characteristics of their child and to describe the family environment. Also at this time, the parents, teacher, and student set the student's goals for the coming year. Subsequent conferences address the student's progress in accomplishing these goals and setting new goals.

Teachers and parents alike are enthusiastic about the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process, agreeing that it is an accepted and valuable component of the program at South Pointe. On the 1991-1992 EAI Teacher Survey, 100 percent of the teachers surveyed indicated that the PEP process helped them to better understand their students. In interviews conducted during 1992-1993, teachers continued to report that the parent conferences and the student goal-setting process formed the basis for the day-to-day activities with the children. Parents have also been pleased with their children's progress in achieving the goals and objectives set in the PEP process. According to the Tesseract Quality of Service Survey (see Appendix), which rates parent satisfaction in 15 areas, parents also expressed great satisfaction about being involved in this part of their children's education.

Principle 2: Teachers and students work in a collaborative/ cooperative setting.

Secretary of Labor Robert Reich (1992) reports that a collaborative work culture is becoming the norm in the most successful businesses in this country. He, therefore, suggests that schools should be places where teachers and students work in collaborative teams as well.

One of the most distinctive features of South Pointe Elementary School is the magnitude of collaborative/cooperative work that goes on there. All teachers, associate teachers, and students at South Pointe from each grade level are organized into learning communities. The teachers and students comprising a learning community begin each day with a 15-20 minute meeting to make daily announcements and to discuss topics of general interest. At this time, the teachers and students introduce special guests, the students share stories or objects from home, and everyone celebrates birthdays together. Since the students remain in their communities throughout their enrollment at the school, they know who their teachers will be at each grade level and the teachers get to know their students better.

South Pointe teachers also collaborate extensively with each other. Teachers from each community meet together weekly to plan the daily activities and to discuss the continuity of the curriculum and student transition from grade level to grade level. Throughout the classrooms and teacher workrooms, teachers can be observed working together, conferring about a student's progress, or discussing a curriculum or technology issue. During their interviews, teachers frequently mentioned consulting with other teachers when they needed help in a specific area. They all seem to know who the experts are in technology, learning styles, High/Scope, process writing, discipline, Math Their Way, journal writing, etc.

Principle 3: The teacher's role is to be a guide, coach, and facilitator of a program that treats and teaches children individually.

Leading educational experts, such as Fullan (1991) and Sizer (1992), recommend that the role of the teacher change from an on-stage lecturer to a coach, facilitator, role model, and listener. The active learner, not the teacher, should be on center stage.

Although moving off center stage and orchestrating many different student activities have been the most difficult adjustments, all of the South Pointe teachers interviewed indicated that they now feel more comfortable working as coaches and facilitators. During the 1991-1992 teacher interviews, several teachers had indicated that relinquishing absolute control over student learning was a difficult transition. By the 1992-1993 school year, however, classroom observations revealed significant growth in this area. Now it is rare to see a teacher-directed lesson being delivered to 30 students. Instead, teachers and

associate teachers work with students in a cooperative learning group or in a High/Scope learning activity. Students spend their time participating in these group activities, working at a computer station, reading alone, or working on a journal or mathematics activity. Observations and interviews have also revealed that, for many teachers at the school, the role of coach and facilitator is now embedded within their daily teaching strategies. Others say that they are still working out their own "subjective meaning" for the words "coach" and "facilitator" of student learning–an internal struggle that Fullan (1991) points out is "the way real significant change comes about" (p. 31).

Principle 4: The language arts program is based on the Whole Language approach and places considerable emphasis on process writing.

Classroom observations and teacher interviews indicate that writing is part of the work and fun culture of South Pointe Elementary School and that it is an institutionalized part of the teachers' and students' day. (Note: Because students write frequently during the day, the 1992-1993 assessment focused on the free writing and process-writing phase of the language arts program in the Tesseract Way curriculum.) During quiet writing time, students and teachers spend anywhere from 5 - 20 minutes (depending on the grade level) doing independent writing. The students then share their journal entries with partners or in groups. This writing and sharing appears to be a very exciting part of each student's day. Teachers in the preschool and kindergarten programs indicate that they closely monitor their students to determine their readiness for journal writing. Students enter this phase of the writing program as their interests and readiness dictate.

Writing as a process is practiced during the Tesseract Way's Writers' Workshop. During classroom observations, students practiced the skills of prewriting, writing, rewriting, copy-editing, and publishing. They also demonstrated their proficiency with the computer and the word-processing software. During prewriting activities, the teachers helped students build a writing vocabulary and generate writing topics and ideas. During the writing and editing stages, the students used the spell check and thesaurus options to enhance their writing. According to South Pointe teacher and expert in process writing, Tami Hahn, who helped review the 1991-1992 and 1992-1993 student publications, the student publications for the 1992-93 school year were of superior quality over the previous year's publications in terms of the length of sentences, use of adjectives, varied subject topics, etc.

Principle 5: Technology is used extensively to develop high self-esteem in students, guide students to become self-directed strategic learners, and provide environments where students have the freedom to learn using their own individual learning style.

In Megatrends, John Naisbitt (1982) warns us of the coming "high tech/high touch era," an era that concerns many educators who fear that the role of the teacher will be sub-

sumed by technology (high tech) and that teachers will lose personal interaction with children (high touch) (p. 1).

Students work with computers daily at South Pointe, and classroom observations and teacher interviews provide strong evidence that the teachers have incorporated the Tesseract Way principle of using technology to develop self-esteem, foster learning, and accommodate varied learning styles. Students work on mathematics and reading using computer-assisted instruction programs developed by Computer Curriculum Corporation and Jostens. In addition, students from the early primary grades through the sixth grade are learning to use word processing for their writing and publication materials. Educational software is used very little in other areas of the curriculum.

Although computers, television, and other audiovisual equipment are used extensively, interactions among students and teachers comprise most of the daily classroom routine. Recognizing that their students have a variety of learning styles, the teachers at South Pointe provide the flexibility and freedom necessary to meet the needs of individual students as they work on their assignments. During classroom observations, their accommodation of different learning styles was evidenced in students' talking with each other concerning assignments, working alone, participating in cooperative learning groups, or discussing a project with the teacher.

Principle 6: Classrooms from preschool through grade six have low student-teacher ratios.

One of EAI's basic tenants is that all Tesseract Way schools have a low student-teacher ratio. This principle is accomplished at South Pointe by assigning an associate teacher (university intern) to each classroom teacher for the full year. This strategy reduces the teacher-pupil ratio to approximately 15 to 1.

This arrangement offers many advantages:

- The professional teachers are able to provide a classroom environment consistent with the Tesseract Way philosophy.
- The process of creating students' individual educational programs is simplified.
- Students have the opportunity to work with a professional teacher and an associate teacher who will soon be a certified teacher.

Principle 7: Staff development is an ongoing process to ensure continuous improvement and full implementation of the Tesseract Way philosophy.

Researchers on the change process, (Fullan, 1991; Hall, Hord, Rutherford, & Huling-Austin, 1987), indicate that one of the reasons that public schools have failed to make significant change in the past is that the major decision makers in the change process typically spend considerable staff development time in initiation activities (i.e., every-

thing that happens prior to using the innovation) but give little attention to implementation issues (i.e., everything related to the actual use of the new practice or innovation). In contrast, successful planners of school innovations pay considerable attention to the implementation phase of the innovation, and staff development includes ongoing support and training that attends to teachers' concerns and needs well into the implementation phase.

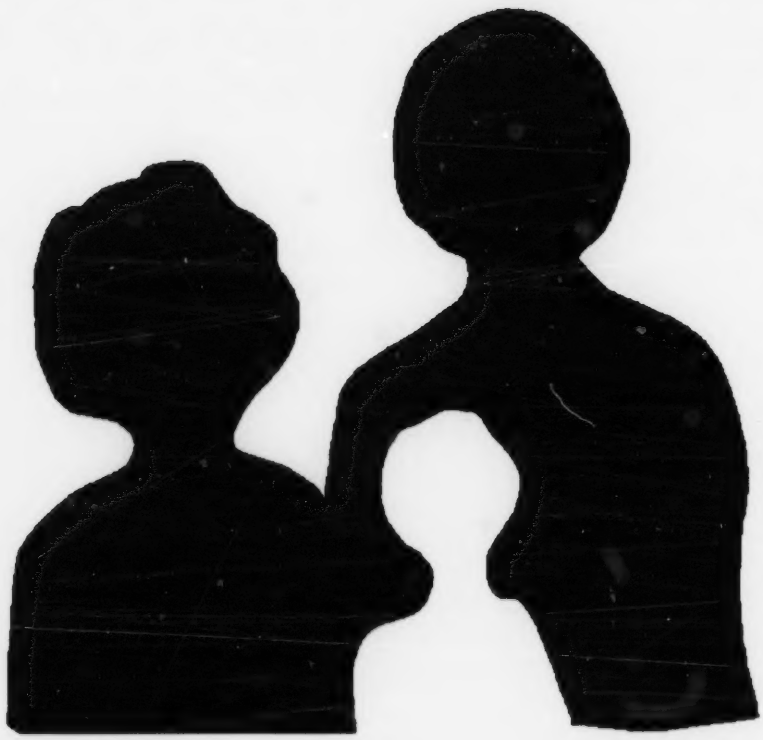
During the approximately 25 days of observation at South Pointe Elementary School over the past two years, a consultant from EAI was almost always present at the school, typically working with teachers on classroom management or curriculum matters. The teachers and principal at the school have indicated that EAI has done a remarkable job of providing the ongoing help and assistance needed to fully implement the Tesseract Way programs. EAI also provided extensive workshops for teachers prior to the opening of each school each year. In addition to taking advantage of the assistance provided by EAI, the teachers and principals have institutionalized a unique collaborative work setting in which teachers regularly interact with each other for the purpose of improving the instruction for students.

Principle 8: There is quality leadership. The school principal performs an important role in ensuring that the culture of the school reflects the Tesseract Way philosophy.

Researchers such as Louis and Miles (1990) and Wilson and Corcoran (1988) outline the importance of the school principal in communicating the vision for the school's program, transforming the culture of the school, and promoting the acceptance of change as a normal process in the continuous improvement of the school and its educational program.

South Pointe's principal constantly interacts with staff, parents, and students to communicate the school's vision and incorporate the Tesseract Way philosophy of education into the daily operation of the school. South Pointe's Shared Decision-Making Council's chairperson indicates that almost all decisions made at the school are by consensus of the council or full staff. The principal's major role is in providing input into the decisions and occasionally reminding the staff of the school's mission.

Many innovations succeed because of the leader; consequently, when the leader leaves so does the innovation. This axiom does not appear to be the case at South Pointe. Several teachers have indicated that the principal has done such a good job of communicating the vision and Tesseract Way philosophy that if this leader were to leave, the program would continue.



Parent Education and Empowerment

South Pointe Elementary School provides many opportunities for parents to be involved with their children's school. This involvement ranges from participating in parent education programs to helping set goals for their children. As a result, parents have reported a very high degree of satisfaction with the Tesseract program (see Appendix).

Several types of parent education programs are offered at South Pointe. Approximately 25 parents participate in an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) parent program that is taught by two South Pointe teachers. One teacher conducts the English as a Second Language activities while the other teacher teaches parents to use the same computer reading and mathematics programs that their children are using. Parents appreciate the opportunity to work with computers, and next year ESOL parents will be working with a computer program designed specifically for adults. These two teachers are confident that there will be twice the number of ESOL parents involved in the program the second year it is offered.

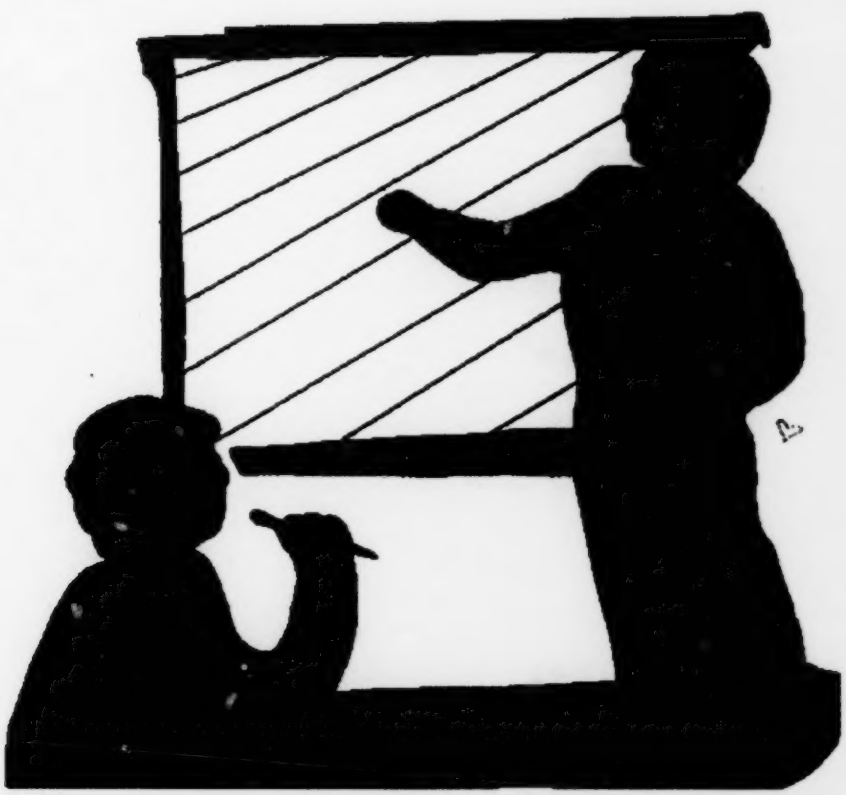
School counselors maintain a collection of parent education materials that includes filmstrips, written materials, and manipulatives on topics such as "How to Help Your Child with Homework" and "Positive Discipline and the Child." These materials are available for parents to check-out and return.

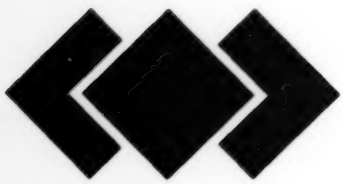
During the 1992-93 school year, EAI provided a series of parent workshops on a variety of topics ranging from health-related issues to the parent's role in a child's education. Unfortunately, attendance at these workshops was low. The workshops were held in late afternoon, which may account for the low parent attendance. The staff will continue to offer these workshops but will experiment with various techniques, such as changing meeting times, to increase parent attendance .

In addition to school-sponsored outreach, the individual school communities hold several events each year that involve parents. For the past two years, the children, teachers, and parents have worked together to prepare Thanksgiving dinner. The children are served by the parents and the teachers. Activities such as the holiday dinner allow the teachers, siblings, and parents to further develop bonds of friendship and mutual support.

The process involved in developing the Personal Education Plan is very powerful in supporting parents' involvement in their children's education and school activities. According to the 1992-1993 Tesseract Quality of Service parent survey (see Appendix), parents overwhelmingly support the use of the Personal Education Plan that is developed

for each child. Some parents indicated that their experience at South Pointe has been the first time that they felt their opinions were important in establishing the educational program for their children. They also indicated an exceptionally high level of satisfaction with the methods teachers use for communicating what is happening at the school and indicated that the staff listens and responds to parents' needs and concerns. These findings are also substantiated by written and oral comments from parents. Teacher interviews and classroom observations also indicate that the teachers and administration are continuing to empower parents to become involved in their children's learning program and to participate in parent education workshops.



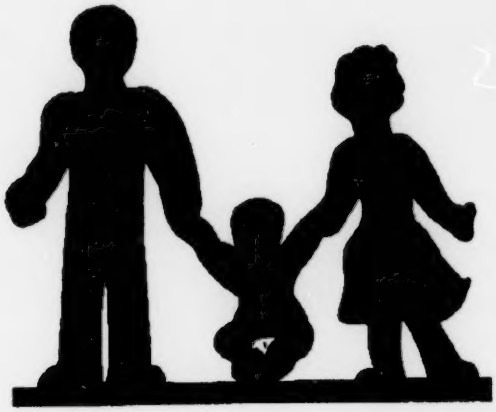


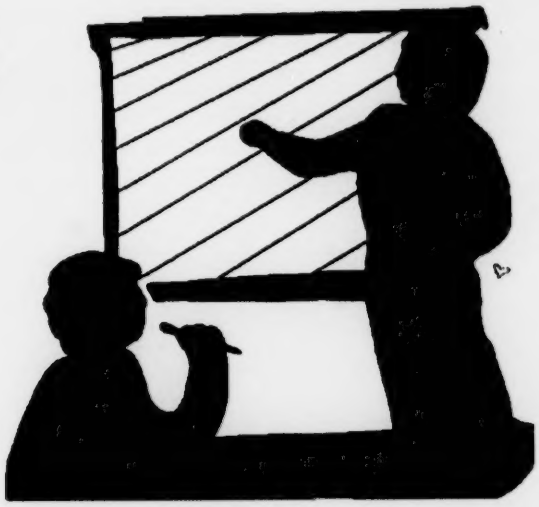
Collaborative Relationships with Other Agencies

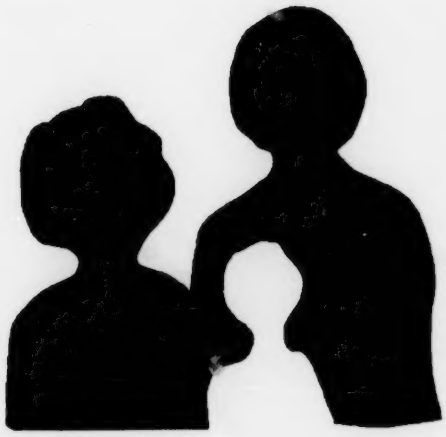
From New York City to San Diego, full-service schools are springing up in inner-city areas across the nation. In these schools, health and social agencies operate out of the school to help families obtain a variety of services. Although South Pointe Elementary School does not fall into the full-service school category in that the school does not provide health and social services on site, administrators and counselors have established excellent working relationships with personnel at the local health and social services agencies. These relationships help South Pointe families receive the health and social services for which they are eligible.

The director of the nearby Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS) office concurs that a collaborative relationship exists between the agency and the school. Because there is not a cumbersome referral process, school counselors can call appropriate HRS officials directly to arrange meetings for families needing the services of that office.

Officials at the Stanley Myers Clinic indicate that the same kind of close relationship also exists between the school and clinic personnel. School officials help parents obtain the medical services provided by the clinic. In addition, the University of Miami Family Residence physicians located at the clinic frequently visit South Pointe to answer questions concerning medical issues and to talk to the children about establishing good health habits.







Conclusion

The success of a new program designed to bring about significant educational changes depends a great deal on how well the goals and guiding principles of the change are embedded into the vision and work culture of the school. Accordingly, the major focus of the 1992-1993 assessment was on the extent to which EAI's Tesseract Way philosophy, vision, and culture was being incorporated into the beliefs, values, and daily work culture of South Pointe Elementary School. The 1992-93 study of how well the Tesseract Way philosophy was being incorporated into the vision and work culture of the school resulted in the following findings:

- There is a high degree of agreement between the operation of South Pointe Elementary and the Tesseract Way philosophy.
- The professional staff believe that children greatly benefit from the Tesseract Way program.
- The guiding Tesseract Way principles are becoming institutionalized into the daily work culture of the school outreach programs.

This assessment also reported the following findings regarding the school's effectiveness in empowering parents to be viable partners in the educational process and in helping families obtain health and social services:

- School personnel continue to provide education programs that address the parents' educational needs. While the PEP process continues to be a highly successful way to involve parents in their children's education, more work needs to be done in expanding attendance at parent workshops.
- The counselors and principal are doing a good job of providing parents with the information they need in order to receive social and health-related services.

Future Study

The bottom line in any successful school program is how well children are achieving, both academically and socially. For this reason, the major focus of a 1993-1994 assessment should be on academic achievement. Such a study would involve disaggregating student achievement on factors such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomics, attendance, discipline, and student mobility. A correlation could then be drawn between these data and the information collected during the first two years of the assessment. This study could provide the educational community with valuable research data.

Appendix

TESSERACT QUALITY OF SERVICE SURVEY
SOUTH POINTE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Prepared by

David Pearce Demers
Marketing Research Consultant
Shoreview, Minnesota

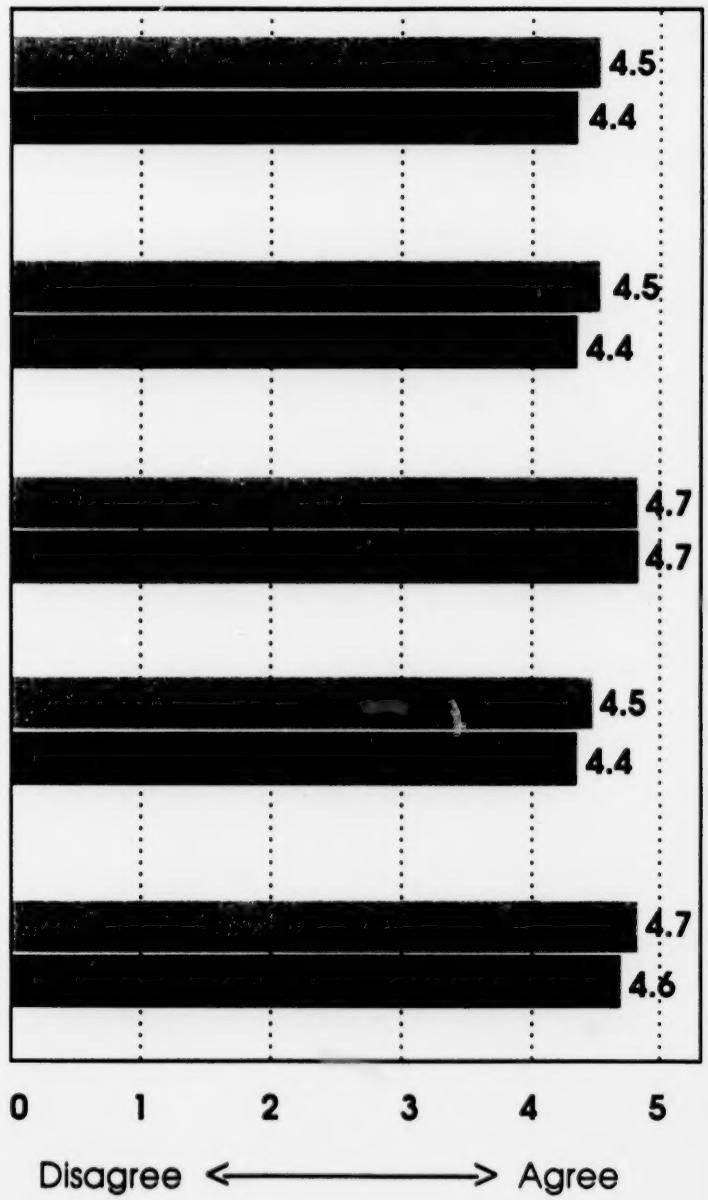
Tesseract Quality of Service Survey

Spring 1993

South Pointe

Combined

1. My contact with all staff members is positive.
2. The South Pointe staff listens and responds to my opinions, needs and concerns.
3. My child is happy at South Pointe Elementary School.
4. Classroom discipline is fair and consistent.
5. My child's teacher communicates with me about what's happening at school.



Winter 92 = (n= 249)

Spring 93 = (n= 300)

Tesseract Quality of Service Survey

Spring 1993

South Pointe

Combined

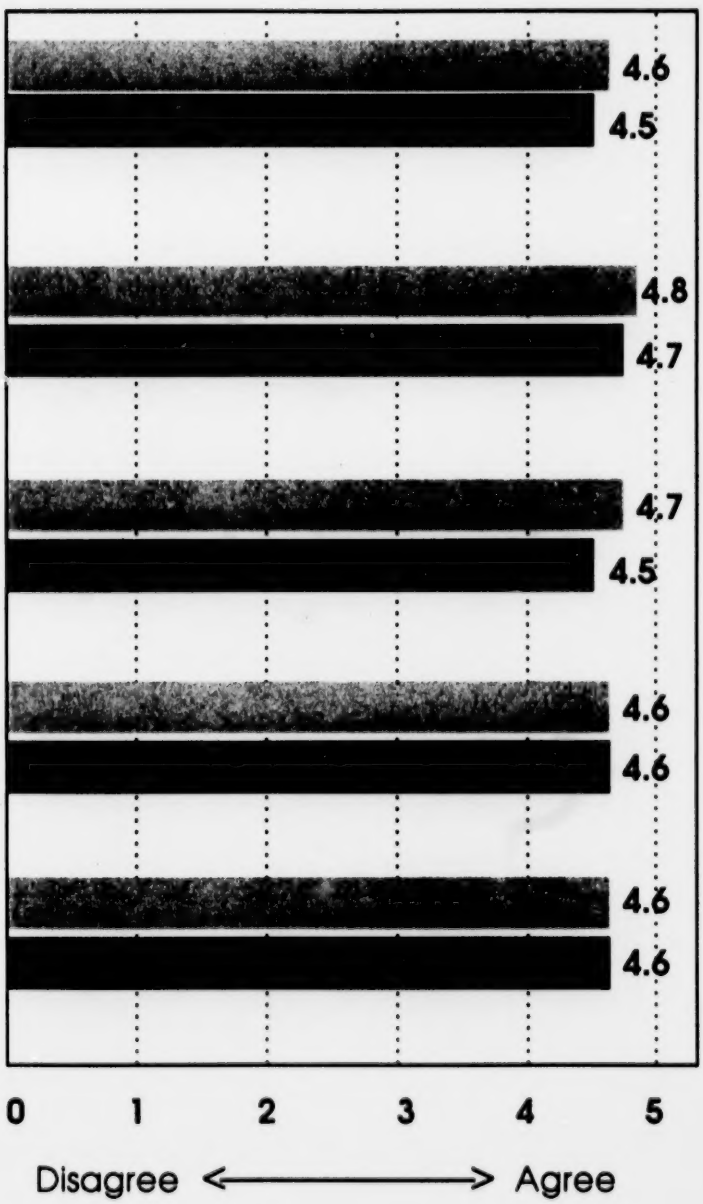
6. My child is progressing toward his/her PEP goals and objectives.

7. I am satisfied with my child's teacher.

8. I am satisfied with my child's associate teacher.

9. I am satisfied with the principal.

10. I receive adequate notice of all South Pointe events that affect my children or me.



Winter 92 = (n = 249)

Spring 93 = (n = 298)

Tesseract Quality of Service Survey

Spring 1993

South Pointe

Combined

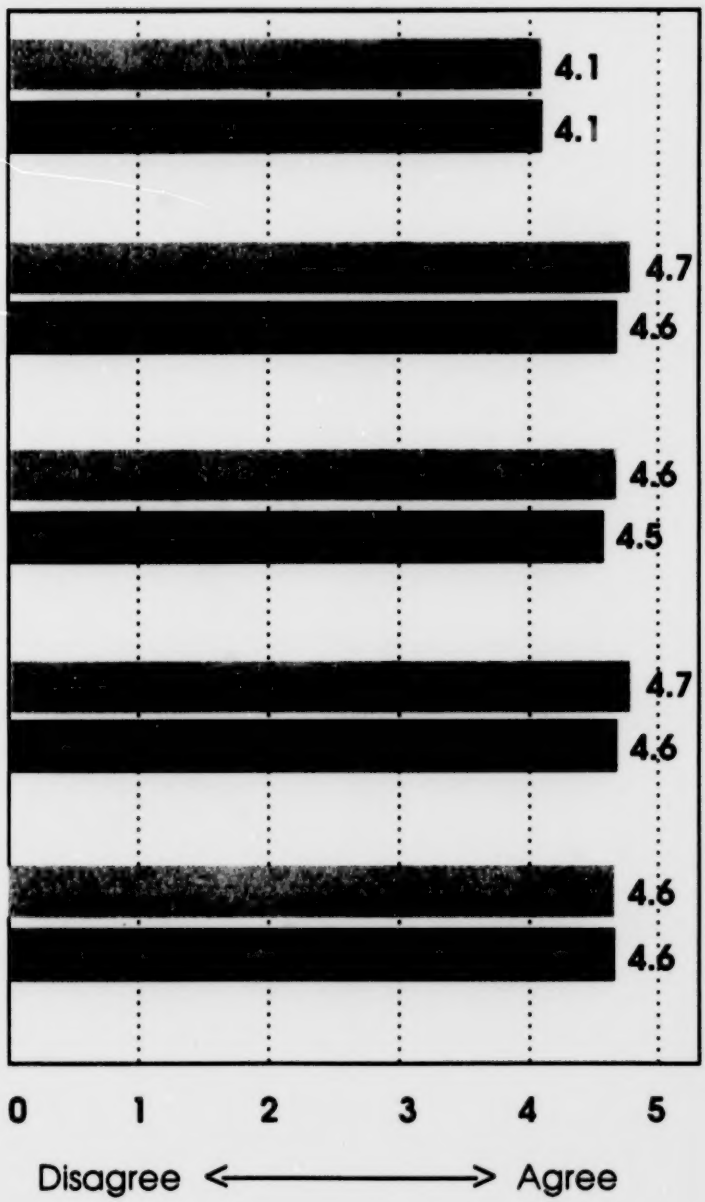
11. I am satisfied with the lunch program.

12. I feel that the school is well run.

13. The mission of South Pointe Elementary School is clear to me.

14. The teacher(s) knows my child(ren) as an individual.

15. I would recommend the Tesseract Education program at South Pointe to other parents.



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